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How Tyeng Siki Became a Christian

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BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Rindge Literature Department
150 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

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I WAS born in a village called Pyeng-May, in the north of Korea. There were only two rooms in our home—one was the kitchen; the other we used for all purposes. The first thing that I can remember regarding an object of worship was a little slip of paper pasted to a cross-beam of our living room; beside the piece of paper was a small basket filled with clothing of bright colors, wherein, it was supposed, dwelt many spirits.

My mother tried to impress upon me that the hospitality in providing the basket and paper had often been the means of appeasing the evil spirits of disease, and they should, accordingly, be always regarded gratefully and reverently.

My father was a peddler, and when he left home to be gone for some time he was in the habit of taking down the basket, and, placing it in the middle of the floor, he would stand in front of it, place the palms of his hands together, raise them high above his head, and make a low salaam, bringing him to his knees and his

head to the floor. The action was accompanied with the words, "Ah, bright spirits, let not thy wrath beset me on the journey. Withhold thy hand of misfortune and disease till my return."

I learned to fear those spirits holding the power of misfortune, and would not stay in the house with them alone. In spite of petitions and constant sacrifice, sickness at last broke out in our home. The evil spirits were everywhere—in the roof, wall, and floor of the house, every green tree, shrub, spring, brook, hill, valley, sky, cloud, and wind. How could we appease the wrath of all? My brother was taken very sick with a fever. At its beginning we sacrificed before the spirits to the limit of our means, but still the disease continued its force. Then we called in the sorceress, and borrowed a large sum to pay her. She and her associates, dressed in fantastic style, with drums, cymbals, and frantic dance, beset the house, nor did the clamor stop for two days. Then my brother died.

The sorceress informed my mother that we had mortally offended a certain number of spirits by neglecting to sacrifice to them, so that not even her skill was sufficient to force them to give up their victim. To avoid future calamity my mother made other baskets of clothing for spirits that we had never heard of before.

I was sixteen years old then, and the death of my oldest brother was a great shock. The shadow of his death followed

me through the days, and the nights were robbed of rest. I visited all the spirit shrines of the neighborhood and worshiped before them. Their power for evil filled me with terror.

At this time I resolved to leave that section and go to my uncle, who lived in a distant part of the country. Securing the consent of my parents, I packed a bundle, and on the night of leaving I went to the spring at the back of our house, waited in silence and darkness till the moment of midnight, then leaned over the water, and waited long for the fire spirit within to lighten the depth and grant me my wish for peace and security on my journey. I saw no light, but thought it must have been that my eyes were dull. I had begun to be filled with matters of worship to the exclusion of everything else. I found a warm welcome at my uncle's. My service in his fields, I believe, was not without profit to him.

The new religion introduced by the foreigners had taken possession of the minds of some of the villagers. My uncle informed me that the infatuation was so great that neither remonstrance, threat, nor persecution was of any avail. The new fanaticism mixed the rich and poor, high and low, indiscriminately. The followers refused old customs, cast aside their gods, neglected their ancestors' graves, and persistently wasted one day out of seven, no matter how urgently their labor was needed on the land. The new religion bid

fair to unsettle the community and, many feared, the future of the state.

A resentment immediately sprang up in my heart, and I gradually learned to hate the Christians. At the close of the year, according to an ancient custom of all villages, our villagers began to collect money for the sacrifice to the patron spirit of the town. I was appointed to help collect the money, and did it enthusiastically.

I visited the leader of the Christians, and asked him to contribute. He is an old man, and had been much respected before he became a follower of the new faith. He has a benign expression of countenance which appeals to one's respect. He refused to give me the money for the sacrifice, explaining that he was a Christian and could not. I was so filled with anger that I forgot that he was old and I young, and giving vent to long-pent-up feelings of hatred, I called him all the vile names I could think of, and threatened to raise a mob and tear his house down.

He retreated to the inner part of the house, and I followed. In the room another Christian was seated, a visitor from a distant town. When I paused in my bitter attack he turned to me and said: "See here, my young friend, listen while I tell you something. You are a worshiper of spirits, and this old man whom you have been abusing is a worshiper of God. He has been the head of the village many years and is old enough to be your grandfather. Now, look at the contrast of the

fruit of your faith and his: you illtreat him, and have laid yourself open to complaint and punishment before the law. He has replied to your abuse with gentleness—yes, more, love. Now, think carefully; which is the better faith, his or yours?"

I could not answer. A weight filled my heart. I left hastily, and thought upon what I had heard, and the more I pondered the more unhappy I became. I finally returned to the old man, and begged a Christian book. I took it home and studied it, and became amazed at the pure truth and simple teachings. I sought the old man for instruction. He forgave me, and taught me till my heart filled with joy, and the long fear of the spirits was gone. I went home and told my uncle. He seemed dumb with astonishment. The persecutor had become a believer. He argued with me, and at last ordered me from his home. Since leaving I have had many hard times, but a great peace is mine, which I would not exchange for the world.